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An eighteenth century mezzotint of Sir John Perrot after the contemporary portrait by an unknown artist now in the possession of His Lordship the Sixth Baron Hampton. (Reproduced by permission of the National Museum of Wales.)

Sir John Perrot (1528-1592): A Fourth Centenary Retrospective

by Roger Turvey

On the night of Friday 3rd November 1592 a sad, lonely and bitter old man passed away just a few days short of his sixty-fourth birthday. Had he lived those extra few days there would have been little cause for celebration for he died a prisoner in the infamous Tower of London in which he had been lodged for over eighteen months. The name of this unfortunate man was John Perrot a knight of Pembrokehire. According to the Tower chaplain's burial register he was laid to rest, within the walls of his prison, in the church of St Peter Ad Vincula, a week later on the 10th.¹ No special ceremony attended his burial, it was a quiet, almost routine and inconsequential affair as befitted the death of a traitor. Perrot died believing himself an innocent man wronged, forsaken by his queen whom he had served loyally for 34 years, forgotten by his friends and likely to be forgotten by posterity. Far worse was the fact that he believed himself to be a failure, the man whom his family could justly point to and accuse of betraying his and their birthright and honour. In short, the man responsible for wiping out over 250 years of Perrot progress, history and pride. For a traitor died with nothing to call his own save his soul: his estates, possessions, self respect and name were all forfeit to the Crown. Fortunately, this versatile and volatile Elizabethan gentleman did not forfeit his right to have his life story recounted. It is therefore fitting that Perrot is remembered this year for it marks the Four Hundredth anniversary of his death in 1592.

When a man has been the subject of few serious published biographies in four hundred years it might reasonably be assumed that either he is of no lasting importance or that adequate material for a life does not exist. In the case of Sir John Perrot neither assumption would be correct. He was a man of remarkable personality - 'a tempestuous and choleric character of Shakespearian proportions' - whose varied career touched on sixteenth-century society at many points.² That he has the rarity of having had a contemporary biography devoted to him, however limited, suggests that he had made his mark and impressed others in his time.³ The fact that in 1940 Mr Percy Evans was awarded the degree of M.A. for a thesis on the life and career of the subject of this commemorative paper clearly indicates the existence of sufficient material to sustain and

material to sustain and indeed, warrant a modern published biography.⁴ Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in the half-century since Mr Evans's research Perrot has been neglected though this through no want of interest for his name and deeds continue to find expression in the pages and footnotes of history. Unfortunately, most writers have been content to rework previous efforts so that errors and a great deal of fanciful exaggeration have solidified into a bogus picture of the man. The activities of Perrot's public and private life deserve comprehensive study. This article is a modest contribution to that enterprise. It relates an outline of Perrot's career, his attitudes and values inferred primarily from his letters and those of his family and contemporaries.⁵

Perrot was a prominent member of that ill-defined social elite, the gentry - 'a term which had acquired a comprehensive and highly elastic definition' - so that a study of his life falls within the broad category of what might be called *gentry studies*.⁶ But what was a gentleman? We may best define this by quoting the words of a contemporary observer of his time, Sir Thomas Smith who said,

Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, who studieth in the universities, who professeth the liberal sciences, and to be short, who can live idly, and without manual labour, and will bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall be called master.....and shall be taken for a gentleman.⁷

In other words an educated man who does not have to work with his hands and who can live like a gentleman is a gentleman. According to Dr Penry Williams this may not be 'the clearest of definitions but it is one which expressed fairly well what contemporaries thought.'⁸ Perrot fulfils this criteria admirably in all respects other than 'those that studieth in the universities' for he received his early education in the cathedral - and presumably grammar - school at St David's and completed it as a page in the household of Sir William Paulet, Lord Treasurer of England and later the Marquis of Winchester.⁹ Nevertheless, without doubt he was a gentleman who exhibited all those traits we have become accustomed to attaching to the stereotypical Tudor squire; pride, arrogance, acquisitiveness and an overabundance of self-confidence. Such characteristics were borne of good family and a long lineage, indeed Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, a contemporary of Perrot spoke for the majority of his class when he said

A great temporal blessing it is and a great heart's ease to a man to find he is well descended, and a greater grief it is for upstarts and

and gents of the first head to look back unto their descents being base in such sort.¹⁰

Perrot himself was born of a family, to quote his anonymous biographer

....in equal rank with the auntientest and best born Gentlemen of this Kingdom, his Name and Auncestors having matched with divers honorable and noble Families.¹¹

Who then were the Perrots?¹² By the early sixteenth century they were powerfully planted in south-west Wales, establishing themselves firmly in Pembrokeshire. By this time the family consisted of several branches settled at Scotsborough with its cadet at Tenby, Haverfordwest, Kidwelly, Cheriton and of course the main line at Haroldston just outside Haverfordwest. Contrary to the historically accepted story they first appear in the county not in the 1120s but in the 1290s; post-conquest Wales. They were *advenac* esquires or new blood of English origin who established themselves as military tenants of the de Valence earls of Pembroke. The Perrots typify the so-called rise of the gentry and over the next two hundred years through a series of good marriages, careful estate management, office holding, common sense and a good deal of good fortune, they acquired power and prestige. Although promotion from the lower ranks was neither rapid nor spectacular, by the mid-fifteenth century they had taken their rightful place amongst the county's ruling elite. By the time of John Perrot's birth, probably at Haroldston sometime between the 7th and 11th of November 1528, they were the leading and largest landowners in the county.¹³

His birth was almost immediately attended by misfortune and subsequently myth. His father, Thomas Perrot esquire, died young, as had his elder brother and heir Robert and their father Sir Owen had done before. Thomas died at the age of 26 in September 1531 after five years of marriage leaving a 21 year old widow, two daughters and a son not yet three years old. Thus John was denied a father's love had the latter been disposed to offer it, denied the guidance and instruction in all things pertaining to the Perrot family. He was brought up by his mother, Mary, a niece of Maurice, Lord Berkeley, of a prominent noble family from Gloucestershire and by her second husband, Sir Thomas Jones. Sir Thomas was 18 years her senior, a cousin of the powerful Sir Rhys ap Thomas of Dinefwr and a man with connections at court, being a gentleman usher in King Henry VIII's chamber.¹⁴

Sir John Perrot, 1528-1592

Apart from the death of his father, the real misfortune suffered by Perrot was the fact that as a minor for such a long period his destiny, and that of his family, was controlled by others. He was too young to defend his family's fortunes or to take advantage of the opportunities to increase the family's landholdings; for example with the dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s. Nevertheless, he was fortunate that the relationship between him and his step-father was a close and warm one. Indeed, Perrot became and remained until the latter's death in 1586, very close to his step-brother, Sir Henry Jones. As far as we can tell his early life seems to have been a happy one.

For almost 350 years one of the most compelling mysteries concerning Sir John Perrot has been the circumstances of his birth. Indeed, it has been the subject of a most powerful, and even in the more critical atmosphere of the twentieth-century, enduring myth. It has been claimed, and almost without exception believed, that he was a royal bastard; a natural son of Henry VIII. However, recent research has strongly suggested that this colourful and attractive myth has no foundation in fact.¹⁵ Research has identified the earliest source for the story, a work written in the early 1630s by the politician and writer, Sir Robert Naunton, who incidentally, was married to Perrot's granddaughter Penelope.¹⁶ This fact has tended to lend the story some credibility. The story hinges on three statements made by Naunton. The first is a rather dubious comparison between Perrot and Henry VIII in terms of his 'qualities, gesture and voyce'. The second reports a conversation between Perrot and the Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir Owen Hopton, in which, hearing of his condemnation for treason, Perrot is supposed to have said, "Will the Queen suffer her Brother to be offered up as a sacrifice to the envy of my frisking adversaries". Finally Naunton said that 'Sir Thomas Perrot, his father, was a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to King Henry VIII and in the court married a Lady of great honour of the King's familiarity, which are presumptions of some implication'. Naunton's statements are littered with inaccuracies, not the least of which is the fact that Perrot's father was never knighted and never held a privy position close to the king. Further, there is no way that Perrot could have held such an incriminating conversation with Hopton who had been relieved of his duties as Lieutenant of the Tower some eighteen months before. Indeed, it and the comparison between Perrot and the long dead king bears all the hallmarks of malicious gossip.

Having completed his secondary education at St Davids, where he

acquired some skill in languages, French , Spanish and Italian among them, Perrot proceeded to London some time in 1546 aged 18, to begin what turned out to be a rather turbulent three year apprenticeship in the household of Sir William Paulet. Here the youthful Perrot soon gained an unenviable reputation for violence. On one occasion he and his fellow page, Henry Neville, Lord Bergavenny quarrelled and before either could be separated they broke 'glasses about one another's ears' so that 'blood besprinkled ...the chamber'.¹⁷ No doubt he owed his introduction to Paulet to his step father, Sir Thomas Jones and in turn owed his introduction to the Court of Edward VI to Paulet, his instructor in the social graces, manners and Court etiquette. Perrot had begun to tread a well worn path for the most important road to wealth and fortune in the sixteenth-century was the favour of the Crown. In the autumn of 1549, aged 21, Perrot was first introduced to the Royal Court. He proved a most durable if ill at ease courtier, but remained a familiar figure there for over forty years. An example of his unease in polite company is given by his son who reported a conversation between Perrot and a friend thus,

Being told by a friend that he was no courtier Perrot replied "Why so, I have lived in and about the court as long as most of them." "I" but said his friend "you cannot flatter". Perrot asked "is that the principal part of a courtier". "Yes" answered the other, "Then I will never be courtier as whilst I live".¹⁸

What was Perrot like? He was described by one who knew him, his son Sir James Perrot as,

A Man in Stature very tall and bigg, exceeding the ordinary Stature of Men by much, and almost equal to the mightiest Men that lived in his Time: His Body was very compact and proportionable through all the Partes: As he did exceed most Men in Stature, so did he in Strength of Body, His Hair was Alborne, untill it grew gray in his elder Yeares. His Countenance full of Majestie, his Eye marvelous percing, and carrying a commanding Aspect, insomuch as when he was angrie he had a very terrible Visage or Looke; and when he was pleased or willing to shew kindness, he then had as amiable a Countenance as any Man: All which as many as knew him can well testify for a Truth.¹⁹

Over the next few years he steadily rose to prominence and gained

Sir John Perrot, 1529-1592

valuable experience at Court where he attached himself to the powerful Dudley faction. Its leader, John Dudley, duke of Northumberland, had by 1549 become Lord Protector of England and in theory ruled on behalf of but in reality ruled over the boy King Edward VI. Perrot became a lifelong friend of Ambrose Dudley, the duke's son and elder brother of the more famous Robert, future Earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth. No doubt as a result of Dudley influence Perrot was knighted within a week of achieving his majority in November 1549.²⁰ His continued success at Court seemed assured for under Edward VI he served the Crown in local government, becoming Sheriff of Pembrokeshire in 1551, whilst in the same year accompanying the Marquis of Northampton on a foreign mission to France to arrange the marriage of Edward VI with a French princess.²¹

Yet life was not all plain sailing for the young twenty five year old Perrot for he lost his wife, Ann Cheyney, in childbirth after only two or three years of marriage. No doubt the blow of her death was softened somewhat by the birth of a son and heir Thomas in September 1553.²² Unfortunately, it seems that Perrot was easily dazzled by the bright lights of London, the gaiety of the Court and the spending power of his wealthier friends for in an effort to keep up he soon plunged himself into debt. In a letter to a friend Perrot wrote of his reckless apending on 'the tilt and other toys I am ashamed to tell'.²³ The means by which he escaped ruin became a favourite and oft told story by Perrot to his friends. It is recounted by his son thus;

..on a Time he walked out of the Court, into a Place where commonly the Kinge did use to come about that Howre; and there he began [either knowing that the Kinge would come that way or else by Chaunce,] to complayne as it were agaynst hymselfe, unto hymselfe: How unfortunate and unwise he was soe to consume his livinge, having wasted a great Part of that in few Yeares, which his Auncestors had gotten and enjoyed for many Yeares? "And must I" (quoth he) "be the man that shall overthrow my Howse which hath continued soe longe? It had byn better I had never byn born".... As he was thus sadly debating the Matter unto hymselfe, the Kinge came behynd hym, and overheard most of what he sayd, who at length stepped before him, and asked him, "How now Perrott" [quoth the Kinge] "what is the matter that you make this great Moane?" To whom Sir John Perrot answered "And it lyke your Majestie I did not thinck that your Highness had byn there": "Yes", sayd the

King, "we heard you well inough: And have you spent your Livinge in our Service, and is the King so yonge and under Government, that he cannot give you any Thinge in Recompence of your Service? Spie out sumwhat, and you shall see whether the Kinge hath not the Power to bestow it on you". Then he most humbly thanked his Majestie...²⁴

However, though he may have been saved from penury his ever increasing prominence and influence received a setback with the death of Edward VI, the fall of Dudley and the accession of Queen Mary. Perrot was no catholic but a firm and committed protestant, a fact clearly evident from a statement in his will to the effect that he '...sithence the Beginninge of King Edwarde the Syxthe his Raynge abhorred the Pope's Idol of the Masse'.²⁵ He was actively involved in saving fellow protestant 'heretics' by offering them shelter in his home at Haroldston. In a period when many bent and changed their beliefs to suit the prevailing winds of religious change, to his credit Perrot held firm. Was this courage or sheer stubbornness? It is a difficult question to answer for a stubborn man he certainly was for though received at Court by Queen Mary she was unhappy about his protestant beliefs, as Perrot put it 'he did smell of the Smoake' but undeterred he persisted in pursuing his claim for what later became his principal residence, Carew Castle.²⁶



The Elizabethan façade of Perrot's hall at Carew Castle, Pembrokeshire; the principal residence of Sir John Perrot from about 1558 till 1592

Sir John Perrot, 1528-1592

The story is related by the son that having,

a suite unto the Queen, for the Castle and Lorship of Carew [and a Promise thereof being made unto hym] when next he came unto the Queen to renew his Suite, the Queen would scarce look at hym mych less give him any good Answer; which he percevinge, determynd not to be sett from his Suite by austere Lookes, and so pressed so neere to the Queene, that he fell upon some Part of her Trayne, and besought her Majestie to remember her Princely Promise made unto hym for Carew, wherewith she seemed highly offended, and in angrie sorte ask'd, "What! Perrot" sayd she, "Will you offer Violence to our Person?" Then he besought her of Pardon for his Boldness; but she departed with much indignation.²⁷

He was a most fortunate subject for after five years of lobbying he got his wish sometime in 1558. He proved somewhat of a nuisance, a troublesome subject imprisoned on three separate occasions for short periods for offences ranging from helping heretics, brawling with the earl of Worcester and, more seriously, on suspicion of treason. Without doubt he had aligned himself with a group in Parliament, he had himself become an M.P. by this time, opposed to the Queen and her government.²⁸ Fortunately for him, he was a peripheral figure in the whole affair; others were executed, he was spared. His time in the Tower taught him a salutary lesson and in 1557 he thought it prudent to remove himself from the country. He returned to France, this time on a military rather than a diplomatic mission, taking part in the siege of St Quentin under the earl of Pembroke, William Herbert. For above all else Perrot was a soldier, as Naunton calls him, 'a goodly gentleman and of the sword.'²⁹

With Mary's death in late 1558 his fortunes rose again being conspicuously favoured by the new Queen Elizabeth, for example he was chosen to be one of her four bearers to carry the canopy of state at her coronation; for some this has lent credence to the story of his alleged royal birth. It is under Elizabeth that the career of the now thirty something Perrot really takes off. He was given the opportunity to further his career at Court, in the service of the Crown and to increase his wealth and influence in Pembrokeshire. In 1561 he was given a commission to search for and keep concealed monastic property in the county which enabled him, late in the day, to redress the misfortune which had befallen the family in missing out on the spoils of the dissolution. In the following year he established himself as the chief

magistrate or *Custos Rotulorum* in Pembrokeshire. Having been a Justice of the Peace for some years previously, this 'promotion' bolstered his already growing authority in the region. He had already been invested with the stewardship of the manors of Carew, Coedrath, Narberth, Pembroke and St Clears and with the constableness of the castles of Narberth and Tenby. Even the chief town of the county, Haverfordwest, did not escape his attention. He became Mayor there on three separate occasions, in 1560-61, 1570-71 and 1575-76.³⁰

During these years - 1560s - Perrot divided his time equally between Court and country and he was able to build a strong powerbase in south-west Wales where his faction, a group of supporters drawn from the local gentry, soon gained an unenviable reputation for forceful and sharp dealing. Indeed, Perrot himself was soon attracting a host of powerful enemies both at Court and in the country. Some were envious of his local power and access to the Queen, others angry at their treatment by him - and with good reason - whilst the remainder were drawn to one side or the other against their will. In Pembrokeshire at least, it was difficult to remain aloof from faction politics and Perrot influence.

It was some relief for his enemies that in 1571 the Queen saw fit to employ his talents on a wider stage when he was given the first of his appointments in Ireland. As the first Lord President of Munster his role was rather more military than bureaucratic and most commentators then and now agree that his two years service in southern Ireland was a success. It is here in Ireland that we have evidence of his extraordinary if reckless courage. In an attempt to put down the rebellion of James Fitzmaurice, the Lord President swore to 'hunt the fox out of his hole' but was drawn into a trap. Being outnumbered ten or twelve to one he refused to surrender and continued to fight and would certainly have lost his life but for the opportune arrival of reinforcements.³¹ He came back in 1573 far from happy. he was worn out by the rigours of his experience and felt every part of his forty five years. He vowed never to return, indeed, he had been reluctant to go in the first place and he was in fact sent as a second choice. 1573 marks a change in Perrot, the youthful exuberance is replaced by a more thoughtful and reflective middle aged man. He wrote to the queen's chief minister, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, 'That he was determined to lead a countryman's life and to keepe out of debt'.³²

For the next ten years the ageing Perrot increasingly turned his back on Court and spent much of his time in Pembrokeshire. Here he turned to extending and developing his estates which often resulted in him

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treading on the toes of his sensitive neighbours. One such was Thomas Wyrriot, a distant cousin who became an implacable enemy, pursuing Perrot through the courts for nearly ten years until he, Wyrriot, was ruined.³³ George Owen of Henllys, another opponent, records the names of over a dozen gentlemen who had lost land or money for merely challenging or standing up to Perrot.³⁴ During this time he was not forgotten by the queen who in 1574 approved his appointment to the Council of Wales and the Marches, the supreme governing body for the Principality and adjacent English marcher counties.³⁵ He was also active on a number of royal commissions and in 1579 agreed to command a squadron of ships to patrol off southern Ireland to prevent a possible Spanish landing. It was on this mission that he and his son Thomas nearly lost their lives in a storm. The story is related by his youngest son,

..a speedie Death should end theyr Accounts. Insoemuch that all Sir John Perrot's neerest Friends and Followers came to take theyr last Farewell of hym, [as they then thought] amongst the rest his Sonne Sir Thomas Perrot was one: to whom he sayd "Well boy, God blesse thee, and I give thee my blessing. I would to God thou wert ashore, and the Queenes ship saffe; then I would care the less for myselfe". With that Wish and Resolution Sir John Perrott committed hymselfe to the Mercie of God and comforted them that were about hym; they All continuing that Night hopeless of Life, or of Deliverance from Danger.³⁶

Needless to say Sir John Perrot, his son and shipmates were spared when their ship ran aground. In fact, this naval appointment was very much in keeping with his preoccupation with the sea for since 1575 he had been given responsibility for the suppression of pirates along the coasts of south Wales and the Bristol channel.³⁷ Here again Perrot has fallen a victim to myth created by a combination of innuendo, tall tales, and the vitriolic accusations of those determined to destroy him. Almost all his fellow gentry involved in matters connected with piracy would agree that one would be more likely than not to be tainted with the stain of corruption. In many cases this was true, for the rewards were attractive and even Perrot cannot be declared entirely innocent in this respect, but the extent to which he has been credited with becoming involved is exaggerated; history has tended to view Perrot as a royal bastard and a pirate.

In 1584 the call for his services again echoed within the walls of the Court. The queen determined to deal with Ireland effectively but

cheaply, was sufficiently impressed by Perrot's treatise of 1581 on governing that unhappy island to offer him the opportunity of putting his ideas into practice.³⁸ Service in Ireland, that graveyard of reputations, of which the wise steered clear, called to the ambitious; the queen flattered, Perrot took the bait and he began that fateful journey which would eventually end in his ruin. This well illustrated the character of the man for he was seduced by the prestige that came with the queen seeking his opinion and service and all that was attached to the position and influence the Lord-Deputyship of Ireland brought. His four years in Ireland proved to be a mixture of great achievements, bitter disappointments, increasing ill-health and a growing fear of dying in that 'slimy country'. Two letters written in October 1586 and August 1587 well illustrate his feelings at that time.³⁹

But by God Mr Carew, I daily grow weaker and weaker of body through the great pain I have of the stone growing more and more upon me. The experience I had in Connaught; where in my travels, through the grating of the stone in my kidneys, If I travelled one day I was fain to rest another and in the end the Irish ague took me that I was like to die in Galloway

I think verily I shall not see christmas for the stone is grievous unto me, my stomack is very weak and my legs do swell so greatly. By God I do not complain. Remember my suit to her Majesty which is to see her before I die. For my own part death is the least thing I care for.

Signatures of Sir John Perrot (1581) and Dame Mary Whitney (1570), his mother. Cawdor (Lort) Documents 1/61; 17/683 (Reproduced by permission of Mr John Owen, County Archivist, Carmarthen.)

Nid yw'r hawliau gennym i
arddangos y deunydd hwn.

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Sir John Perrot, 1528-1592

Certainly, Perrot was displaying signs of a more violent temper resulting in brawling with his minister and resorting to too much swearing. This has led one Irish historian recently to suggest that he may have been suffering from insanity but there is no evidence to support this contentious speculation⁴⁰. He was a lonely man, far from home, frustrated at the lack of support and appreciation of his work by his queen and by those he governed, the native Irish. He returned in 1588 with his reputation intact, quite a feat in the Elizabethan period. The queen soon after confirmed his appointment to the Privy Council - in February 1589; this proved to be the highlight of his career. However, unbeknown to him the foundations of his position and influence at Court had already begun to crack. As early as March 1589 Thomas Widebank wrote to Walsingham, the Queen's Secretary of State, that having had his audience with the queen immediately after Sir John Perrot had left her, he says 'what had passed he knows not but he found her out of tune'.⁴¹

His Irish service proved to be the catalyst for his enemies to bring him down. Perrot wrote to a friend, 'I do here ... grow to utter contempt and no thing hath so much hurt me as wind whispered in corners.'⁴² This whispering campaign soon turned into an avalanche of calls for his head. In March 1591 he was removed to the Tower from Lord Burghley's house, where he had been under house arrest for some months, whilst the charges against him were investigated.⁴³ More than a year elapsed before his trial and in a letter dated 23rd December 1591 Perrot complained that his memory was becoming impaired through grief and close confinement. Eventually, on the 27th April 1592 he was tried at Westminster on a charge of high treason before the queen's cousin Lord Hunsdon and others. According to the indictment he was charged with the following: firstly, using contemptuous words about the queen; secondly helping known traitors and Romish priests; thirdly encouraging the rebellion of an Irish gentleman, Sir Brian O'Rourke and lastly writing treasonable letters to the king of Spain and the traitor Sir William Stanley. The prosecution concentrated upon the first charge, the chief witness was an Irish priest of dubious quality and reliability, Dennis O'Roughan. Perrot, who was extremely agitated throughout his trial, did not deny that he might have spoken the words attributed to him but he resented the interpretation placed upon them.

Ah, silly woman, now she shall not curb me, she shall not rule me.....

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God's wounds! this is to serve a base bastard pissing kitchen woman; if I had served any prince in Christendom, I had not been so dealt withal ⁴⁴

He was found guilty and condemned to death on 26th June 1592, thereafter he languished in the Tower awaiting his fate. Even towards the end Perrot never believed that he would be found guilty much less executed. His last will and testament is over three pages long and in reality is nothing more than a vindication of his conduct and an appeal for mercy; none came. Fortunately, Perrot died before sentence could be carried out though there is evidence that the queen intended to pardon him but that he died before this could be done. Certainly, his son, Sir Thomas, was restored to some of his estates soon after the death of his father. Despite the long accepted story of his *natural* death, recent research has suggested that Perrot may in fact have been poisoned which may lend credence to the idea that his pardon was imminent; certainly his enemies could not afford to risk his wrath upon his release.⁴⁵

Contemporaries were not slow to offer reasons why Sir John Perrot fell from grace and died in the ignominious way that he did. Naunton suggested that it was in part due to the fact that he was 'a person that loved to stand too much alone and on his own legs'.⁴⁶ His son was more direct in stating that he was,

more apt to give offence to great ones than to creep or crouch unto them which in the end procured his ruin.⁴⁷

It is generally agreed that Perrot's choleric nature and haughty pride combined with the envy and competition of others contributed to his downfall. He was too blunt and direct a man, 'as far from flattery as from fear that he did not easily fit into the polite ways and manners of Court'.⁴⁸ The final words should perhaps be left to a contemporary friend, Sir Francis Walsingham who said

It cannot be doubted that Sir John Perrot's intentions and purposewere very honourable but his course has not been agreeable to our humour. He might have lived in better season in the time of King Henry VIII, when princes were resolute to persist in honourable attempts, whereunto the Lord Deputy (Perrot) must be content to conform himself as other men do.⁴⁹

Perrot, who never did 'conform as other men do' has never failed to excite and interest those who have come across his life story, tragic though its end may be, but it is probably true to say that he is little known today beyond the bounds of his native Pembrokeshire

Sir John Perrot, 1528-1592

or beyond the books of Tudor historians and their students. He is an attractive and influential figure, who though hardly to be considered among 'the half dozen principal actors of the Elizabethan stage' is certainly to be counted among the dozen or so second rank of supporting actors.⁵⁰ In Pembrokeshire and Wales he dominated, in Ireland he ruled and at Court he competed: it is here that he lost. Nevertheless in 1992 it is he who is remembered and not those anonymous few who brought him down.

NOTES

1. Register of the Tower Chapel Burial Register. I should like to thank Mr Brian Harrison, Yeoman Warder and Honorary Archivist of the Tower of London for this reference
2. G.Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales 1415-1642*, (Oxford, 1987), p. 466
3. R.Rawlinson (ed), *The history of that most eminent statesman Sir John Perrot*, (London, 1728), The original seventeenth century manuscript, or a contemporary copy which Rawlinson is credited with publishing, is currently housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, as Wood MS., D. 33. There is sufficient evidence to attribute the authorship of this manuscript, the long accepted anonymous life of Perrot, to his son Sir James (1571-1637)
4. P.C.C. Evans, *Sir John Perrot*, [Unpublished University of Wales (Cardiff) M.A.Thesis, 1940]
5. A new biographical study of the life and career of Sir John Perrot is currently being researched and written. For a genealogical table of Perrot's immediate family see Appendix.
6. J Gwynfor-Jones, 'Caernarfonshire Administration: the activities of the Justices of the Peace, 1603-1660,' *Welsh History Review* vol V (1970) p.135
7. Penry Williams, 'The Tudor Gentry,' in A.J.Roderick [ed] *Wales through the ages* (Llandybie, 1960), pp. 31-32
8. *Ibid*, p. 32
9. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, p. 24
10. Penry Williams, *Op. cit.* p. 32
11. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 12-13
12. For a fuller discussion on the history of the early Perrots - c. 1290s to 1530s - see my thesis *The Perrot family and their circle in South West Wales during the Later Middle Ages* (Unpublished University of Wales [Swansea] Ph.D. Thesis, 1988)
13. For full details see R.K.Turvey, 'A note of the Date of Birth of Sir John Perrot,' *National Library of Wales Journal*, (forthcoming)
14. For details of Sir Thomas Jones career see S.T.Bindoff (ed) *The House of Commons 1509-1558* (London, 1982), vol I pp. 453-454.
15. For full details see R.K.Turvey, 'Sir John Perrot, Henry VIII's Bastard? The Destruction of a Myth,' *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1992)
16. Robert Naunton, *Fragmentia Regalia, or Observations on the late Queen Elizabeth, her*

Times and Favourites (published 1653) Edward Arber (ed) (London, 1895), pp. 41-44.

17. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, p. 26

18. British Library, Add Ms. 4819f. 118b

19. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 17-18

20. W.A.Shaw, *The Knights of England*, (London, 1971) vol. II, p. 64

21. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 29-30

22. Bindoff *Op. cit.*, vol II p 86 and Public Records Office, C 142/119/114.

23. British Library, Harleian Ms. , 5992, f. 9.

24. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, pp.32-34

25. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, p. 307

26. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

27. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 39-40

29. D.Loades, *Two Tudor Conspiracies*, (Bangor 1992) pp. 225-226 and 239.

30. Naunton, *Op. cit.*, p.41

31. L. Stephens and S. Lee (eds), *The Dictionary of National Biography*, (London, 1885-1900), vol XLV p. 22.

32. *Calendar of State Papers: Ireland*, 1574-1585, p.62

33. Stephens et al., *Op. cit.*, vol. XLV pp. 22-23

34. British Museum, Lansdowne Ms.. 72 f. 4

35. Penry Williams, *The Council of the Marches of Wales*, (Cardiff, 1958), pp. 354-355

36. Rawlinson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 114-115

37. P.W. Hasler (ed) *The House of Commons 1558-1603* (London, 1981), vol II p. 206 and E.R.Williams, *Some Studies of Elizabethan Wales*, (Newtown, 1924) pp. 121-132

38. For a near contemporary copy of Perrot's Treatise on Ireland see the first part of E.C.S. *The Government of Ireland under the Honest, Just, and Wise Governor, Sir John Perrot* (London, 1626)

39. Evans *Op. cit.*, pp. 220-221

40. S.Ellis, *Tudor Ireland*, London 1985, p. 285

41. *Calendar of State Papers:Domestic*, 1584-1591, vol. 223, p.584.

42. Evans, *Op. cit.*, pp. 220-221

43. For full details of the currently accepted story of Perrot's indictment, imprisonment and trial see Stephens et al., *Op. cit.*, vol. XLV pp. 25-26; J.E.Lloyd and R.T.Jenkins (eds.), *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940*, (Cymmrodorion Society, 1959), pp. 747-749; E.M.Tenison *Elizabethan England* (Leamington 1933- 1961), vol. IX , pp. 69-83; W.Cobbett and T.B.Howell (eds) *State Trials* (London, 1809), pp. 1315-1334. This account is based largely on that found in British Library, Lansdowne Ms., 72 f. 8 ff.; P. Henley, The treason of Sir John Perrot, *Studies* (1932) vol. XXI, pp.404-422.

44. Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms., ccxcix. p.477

45. I should like to thank Mr Brian Harrison , Yeoman Warder and Honorary Archivist of the Tower of London, for his views on this, as yet, unresolved matter.

46 Naunton, *Op. cit.*, p. 44

47. British Library, Add Ms., 4819 f. 118b

48. *Ibid*, f. 118b

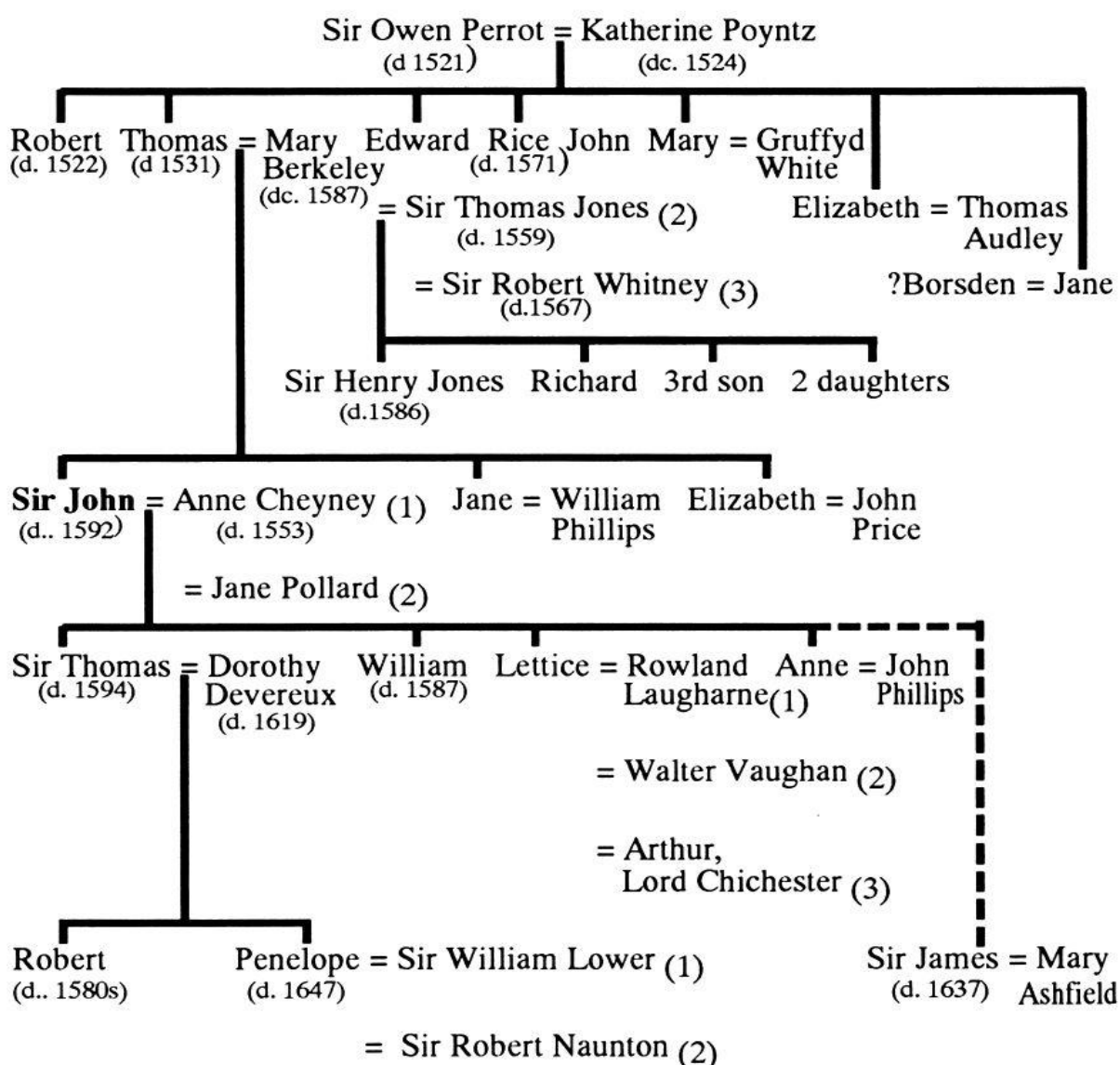
Sir John Perrot, 1528-1592

49. Evans, *Op. cit.* p. 244.

50. Neville Williams, *A Tudor Tragedy: Thomas Howard, Fourth Duke of Norfolk*, (London, 1964) p. xi

The substance of this article was first delivered in a series of public lectures during the Autumn of 1992 to mark the fourth centenary of Sir John Perrot's death most notably at the A.G.M. of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society and by the kind invitation of Dr Gwynfor Jones, to the Welsh History Society at University College, Cardiff.

APPENDIX: A Genealogical table of Sir John Perrot's immediate family.

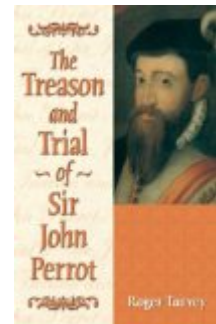


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Roger Turvey. *The Treason and Trial of Sir John Perrot*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005. xii + 208 pp. \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7083-1912-3.

Reviewed by Pauline Croft (Department of History, Royal Holloway University of London)
Published on H-Albion (May, 2007)



A Great Elizabethan?

Dr. Roger Turvey wrote the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Sir John Perrot (1528-92), Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1584 to 1588, and his aim here is, as noted on the front cover, to “restore a great Elizabethan who hailed from Wales to his rightful place in history.” In February 1589, some months after his return from Ireland, Perrot was elevated to the English privy council, but then suffered a spectacular downfall, being charged with treason in 1590. He was tried in April 1592. Found guilty, he was not executed but died in the Tower seven months later, and his family was treated leniently. The first part of the book tells the story of Perrot’s life and end. The second prints the earliest surviving and most complete account of his trial, from BL Lansdowne MS 72. The manuscript formed the basis of T. B. Howell’s account in *State Trials* vol. 1 (London, 1809), now superseded by this valuable edition. Turvey usefully demolishes the notion that Perrot was an illegitimate son of Henry VIII, apparently an unfounded libel by Sir Robert Naunton, but follows Hiram Morgan in accusing Lord Burghley of masterminding a secretive, deadly attack on Perrot, in order to cover up the corrupt administration of Ireland after Perrot’s departure by Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam, a second cousin of Burghley’s late wife.[1]

However, neither William Camden nor Sir James Perrot, Perrot’s bastard son and biographer, saw Burghley in this light, and in his will Perrot was “resolute in his belief that Burghley was to be accounted among his most loyal and steadfast friends” (p. 87). For Turvey this was “misplaced faith,” additional evidence of Burghley’s ser-

pentine duplicity. It is always worrying when modern historians insist that they have uncovered mysterious plots unknown to Tudor contemporaries. Here, plenty of evidence is cited that undermines any conspiracy theory. Firstly, there is no denying that Perrot was a violent, brawling, and vituperative character, who had made many enemies in his native Wales before going on to make even more in Ireland, where the privy council in Dublin was already deeply divided. Perrot alienated influential Irishmen, including the powerful Thomas earl of Ormond, a personal friend of Queen Elizabeth, and also Adam Loftus, Archbishop of Dublin and Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Turvey notes that Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam was in many ways an unwitting instrument of Loftus’s sustained malice against Perrot (p. 69). It was Loftus, not Burghley, whom Perrot blamed in his will. Back in England, with the added status of a privy councillor, Perrot lent his support to all those who were enemies of Fitzwilliam and Loftus: they in turn saw him as worryingly well placed to do them harm. Into this fraught situation came a very dubious priest, Denis O’Roughan. To get himself out of jail, O’Roughan produced a letter allegedly from Perrot to Philip II of Spain, offering to aid him in the conquest of Ireland in return for dominion in Wales. Fitzwilliam then wrote directly to Elizabeth, not Burghley and the English privy council, with this sensational allegation. That made it impossible to avoid an enquiry, particularly as Perrot wrote to Burghley insisting on being charged so that he could clear his name. On the queen’s express order, he was placed under house arrest in Burghley’s luxurious mansion in the Strand, and only later sent to the Tower.

Burghley clearly thought O'Roughan was a rogue, but the queen also commanded Sir Nicholas White, one of Perrot's supporters on the Irish privy council, to be placed in confinement at the house of the Dean of St Paul's. Other charges against Perrot emerged which seemed to have rather more substance. Apparently he had released, unpunished, certain rhymers who composed seditious songs and poems against Elizabeth, and he had been too lenient with the rebel Sir Brian O'Rourke, who ceremonially trashed an image of the queen. The final blow came with the revelation that Perrot had expressed his frustrations over what he saw as Elizabeth's inadequate support of him with phrases such as "God's wounds, this is to serve a base bastard piss kitchen woman," and "Ha, silly woman, ha, fiddling woman, now she shall not rule me, now she shall not curb me." Turvey views these as merely "indiscretions uttered in public" (all quotes, p. 114), but they immediately made Perrot vulnerable to the accusation of treasonous words, under the act of 1571. At the end of his trial, most unusually, Perrot was granted an interview with his judges, and judgment was delayed until the queen was consulted. However, the death sentence was finally pronounced in June 1592, although Perrot was simply left in jail.

There is little discussion here of wider Elizabethan politics. Instead we are offered the catch-all solution of "faction," with Lord Burghley as a paranoid factional leader. But it is noticeable how many other friends of Perrot fell away from him, including the influential Sir George Carew and Roger Manners, eminence grise of the dukes of Rutland. The young Robert earl of Essex, whose sister Dorothy was married to Perrot's son and heir Thomas, stood back until after Perrot's condemnation, then asked Burghley for support in stopping sentence being pronounced. Significantly, Essex noted that it would be hard to move the queen, who seemed "very resolute in it" (p. 86). Concentrating on Wales and Ireland, Turvey largely ignores the whole sequence of plots in England, from Roberto di Ridolfi in 1571, which first convinced Elizabeth that Philip II was her enemy, through Francis Throckmorton and Parry to Anthony Babington in 1586, where Mary Queen of Scots explicitly consented to a plan to assassinate the English queen. These were to be followed by further plots in the 1590s, including that of the hapless Dr. Roderigo Lopez whose fate in many ways is reminiscent of Perrot. To the modern mind the plots may seem absurdly incoherent, but they were a powerful influence on Elizabethan thinking, not least that of the queen herself. The significance of Perrot's public description of Elizabeth as a "base bas-

tard" is simply ignored in this book, but it was explosive, especially in wartime. If she was illegitimate (as all Catholics contended), then she had no right to the throne. So who was the rightful ruler? Was Perrot perhaps a secret supporter of the Infanta Isabella, proclaimed by her father Philip II as queen of England as soon as the Armada should remove Elizabeth? In the immediate aftermath of 1588, there were fears that Philip might think of attacking England afresh, perhaps by planting troops in Ireland, and the king was quick to start rebuilding his naval strength. The two proclamations against seminary priests, written by Lord Burghley in October 1591, bring home vividly the current atmosphere of paranoia in England. Perrot's many enemies in Dublin could raise just enough concern that he was a loose cannon, a man of poor judgment who despised his queen as a bastard and had no scruples over insulting her in public. Drunken old men on alehouse benches who cast similar aspersions on the queen's parentage were hauled before the assize judges as a warning; such slanders coming from a Lord Deputy of Ireland could not be tolerated. Against this tense, fearful background it seemed possible that Perrot might have been tempted into treacherous schemes with Spain. At the very least, if Elizabeth's public reputation had gone undefended (as with the seditious rhymers and O'Rourke's ceremony of ritual degradation), even more so if she personally took umbrage at Perrot's outrageous comments (as indicated by Essex), then Burghley and other privy councillors were unlikely to go out of their way to help him. But that was not the same as deliberately and elaborately plotting to bring Perrot down, in pursuit of unsubstantiated and rather tenuous factional advantage.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of Perrot's career was his elevation as a privy councillor. With Robert earl of Leicester dead and Sir Francis Walsingham mortally ill, the council needed reinforcement, and the situation worsened with the unexpected demise of Sir Christopher Hatton in 1591. Yet thereafter the queen was increasingly reluctant to fill vacancies. It seems likely that she grew wary after the disastrous choice of Perrot. Sir James Perrot realized that his father had largely brought his troubles on himself. "If he had byn able to bridle that passion of choler, wherto he was by nature much adicted, and to forbear over free speach when he was offended, his dayes might have byn longer and his ende more happie" (p. 184). Even to his son, it was obvious that Sir John Perrot was his own worst enemy.

Note

[1]. Hiram Morgan, "The Downfall of Sir John Perrot," in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 109-125.

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Citation: Pauline Croft. Review of Turvey, Roger, *The Treason and Trial of Sir John Perrot*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. May, 2007.

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